


Solo Art Exhibition
 Alluvial Soul
 Artist: Kalidas Karmakar
 Venue: Bengal Gallery, Dhankundi
 Date: Nov 20-Dec 16
 Time: 12-8pm



Bengal Classical Music Fest 2014
 Organiser: Bengal Foundation
 Venue: Army Stadium, Dhaka
 Date: Nov 27-Dec 1
 Time: 5pm -5am



Group Art Exhibition
 Artworks by 40 Eminent Artists
 Venue: Bishwo Shahitto Kendro
 Art Gallery, Dhaka
 Date: Nov 14-28
 Time: 3pm-8:30pm



Star Melodies
 Remembering Feroza Begum
 Organiser: The Daily Star
 Venue: AS Mahmud Hall (Level 3)
 The Daily Star Centre
 Date: November 23; Time: 6pm



Solo Painting Exhibition
 Title: Life is Here
 Artist: Kanak Champa Chakma
 Venue: Bengal Art Lounge, 60,
 Gulshan Avenue, Circle 1
 Date: Nov 15-Dec 6
 Time: 12pm-8pm



China fall of a giant on the horizon?

SHAHER REAZ

The last day of this year's Hay Festival highlighted a promising session on the rise of China and the increasing challenges it faces in a globalised world.

"China - old and new" featured two experts on the South Asian military and industrial giant - Jung Chang, celebrated author of "Wild Swans" and a storyteller who draws on her tumultuous personal experiences with her homeland; and Michael Puett, academic and scholar with a focus on China.

Farooq Sobhan, who served as the Bangladeshi ambassador to China from 1988 to 1991, stepped in as a welcome substitute moderator as Patrick Laude, author and scholar, was delayed by Dhaka traffic for half the session.

The authors discussed China's recent grappling with corruption. Chang commented that the anti-corruption drive by the government is most likely biased. She stated, "There is an incredible amount of restriction placed on journalists in China, so the people identified as corrupt are marked and prosecuted by the government itself. They have no access to proper defense lawyers. It's reminiscent of what Mao did after he led the October Revolution."

As for China's recent troubles, Puett had an ominous prediction that China might be heading towards a financial crisis potentially affecting the entire world. During the Q&A session, an audience member commented she had seen rows of empty housing complexes, similar to the housing bubble that preceded the US financial collapse.

The massive changes happening in China, including the resurfacing of religious faith, the discontent in the hearts and minds of people, were also discussed at the session. The role of the United States as a potential bail-out source was brought into question, to which Laude, who had joined the session by then, replied: "Chinese investment brought the US out of potential financial ruin, but who will act as China to the Chinese?"

As for what is in store for China and, indeed, the rest of the world as a consequence, we can only wait and watch as the great drama unfolds.

The impossibility of knowing

In conversation with Zia Haider Rahman



MAYUKH MAHTAB

Born in rural Bangladesh, raised in the UK and educated from Oxford, Cambridge and Yale Universities, investment banker turned human rights lawyer turned writer, Zia Haider Rahman had his priorities straight when he said, "I can't write for everyone."

Speaking about the huge body of references that are highlighted in his first novel, "In the light of what we know", he firmly refuted the complaint that the book is full of digressions in a stimulating conversation with Firdous Azim on stage on the third day of the Hay Festival 2014. "They all work, the digressions make the novel work and they also inform," he said.

The conversation, like his acclaimed debut book, spanned a great number of subjects from the influence of mathematics and his previous professions on his work to his connections to the Bangladesh he left behind in 1971, from the death of the novel to the challenges of being a

"celebrity" author.

Candid and charismatic, if a bit jet-lagged, throughout the session, Haider highlighted the dilution of the content of novels. In the age of YouTube and quick "dopamine releasing" work, everyone seems to be writing novels with the subsequent film-script in mind. "A novel is meant to be interiorised, and I wrote my novel keeping that in mind; the novel is meant to be read slowly and not rushed through," he said.

The book itself reflects parts of Haider's life, he admitted, although he refuted the comment that the character Zafar was based on him. The age old story of friendship between two men initially drawn together due to their foreign roots is, at the same time, a comprehensive study of modern nations, globalisation, identity and the economic crisis.

"When people tell me they want to write a book, what they really mean is they would like to have written a book," he opined, adding that, for

him, the process of writing was enough; everything that came afterwards - the contract, fame and critical acclaim - were incidental. "I was utterly depressed when I finished writing the book because for four and a half year, there was something that gave my life structure and meaning, and suddenly it was all gone," he remarked. In fact, the constant travelling from one literary festival to another has made him restless because he longs to go back home and "just write", he added.

The amazing turnout of audience and the eager hands in the Q & A session was a testament to how well the novel has been received. Asked if 1971 and Bangladesh's history figures in his writing, he ends with an observation which is very relevant, "Bangladesh has been struggling to talk in a civil manner about 1971." Full of wit, charm and intelligence, the session was largely rewarding as the entire audience sat enthralled listening to the boy who left Sylhet during 1971.

Writing the Region

SAURAV DEY

On the second day of the Hay Festival Dhaka 2014, literary minds from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan explored cross border connections in regional literature. Indian writer Namita Gokhale, Bangladeshi academic and translator Professor Fakrul Alam, and Pakistani short story writer and critic Aamer Hussein engaged in a lively session on "Writing the Region: Is there a South Asian Identity?" Mahrul Mahiuddin, an adjunct faculty at the James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, moderated the session.

The session focused on the question of a South Asian identity in literature. Namita Gokhale began with the complex identity issues of South Asian people. She observed that surrounded by the Himalaya in the North, this subcontinent has one geographical identity and also people of this region have similarities in their culture, food habit and festivities, and even their languages share the same root. She held that borders are drawn with rulers. And to support her statement, Gokhale directed her conversation towards the similarities between Hindi and Urdu, before pointing out the shared literary and cultural heritage of India and Bangladesh.

Prof. Alam spoke about the connections among languages of this region and how people from one linguistic background can comprehend another language without knowing it. He said people of Orissa and Assam know Bangla and Bangla poets. While talking about Bangladeshi identity, he observed that our nationality is marked by 'three divisions'.

Aamer Hussein highlighted how literature from this region is labelled as "South Asian" in London and America. He said that Urdu is spoken in both India and Pakistan, and even though Indian readers seek Urdu books, getting books across the border is often a problem.

Gokhale observed that Urdu is a secular language born in India but later an identity was imposed upon it by the demarcation of borders. She talked about the influences of border in language and culture, while Prof. Alam discussed the rise of language-centric nationalism in Bangladesh starting from 1952. To him, there's both connection and division between the literature of West Bengal and literature of Bangladesh.

The panelists moved on to speak on the influences of language in shaping perceptions of the writers. Gokhale observed that writings of authors like Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie have influences of their nativity. However, Professor Alam opined that a good writer transcends regional boundaries.

Discussion again shifted to a South Asian identity and the panelists observed that a regional identity is possible, as the diasporic populace is interested in literature of their own region. The insightful session came to a close with an urge to go beyond nationalism and opt for internationalism. The panelists believe that the convergence of identity is in the process.

The art of translation

LABIBA ADIL

"[Bangladesh] A country that was formed on the notion of language," said Arunava Singha, one of the most prolific translators in Asia, with over thirty published translated works, when talking about the importance of translation in Bangladesh. Singha admitted that this was a little bit of an "outsider's view" but Kaiser Haq, renowned Bangladeshi writer, translator and academic, agreed with him: "Its growing body of fiction deserves to be translated."

The final day of the Hay Festival showcased translations from the Dhaka Translation Centre workshop. During the workshop, a group of aspiring translators, in a collaborated effort, translated Bangladeshi author Shaheen Akhtar's work in her presence. It was a rare event as the writer herself could oversee if the original work was represented in its proper meaning in another language.

In this context Shaheen Akhtar, Kaiser Haq and Arunava Singha discussed the art of translation in the Common Wealth Writer's Session which was moderated by Katie Griffin.



Shaheen Akhtar reads translated excerpts of her work in a session with Arunava Singha, Kaiser Haq and Katie Griffin.

PHOTO: RIDWAN ADIL RUPON

Griffin posed the question of whether Akhtar had the Bengali reader in mind while writing her book or if she had considered the possibility of a translation and thus of having a more diverse

readership. Akhtar explained that she aimed at writing a good book; and only if a book is good, can it be translated, thus reaching a wider audience in the process, she added.

According to the discussants, the presence of the author during translation enables the translator to understand the essence of the work. "Having the author by your side helps in smoothen-

ing things out," said Shingha.

Like the translation of Akhtar's work, the translator and author oftentimes work together. However, even if many translators consult with the author, at the end of the day, the translator has the last word since he or she has obtained the copyright.

A question from the crowd regarding the significance of literary translations in a world where Google Translate exists brought some laughs from the audience in a session that was already lively and engaging. "Although it is creative, machine translation has not gotten beyond merely the content," argued Arunava Singha.

The panelists jointly voiced the need for more translated works in an increasingly globalised world so that different cultures and streams of thought could be accessed.

Kaiser Haq said the Dhaka Translation Center aims to launch a collection of translated works at next year's Hay Fest, and he hoped there will be a steady stream of both English and Bangla translations in the near future.

To be is to Buzz



FAHMIM FERDOUS

Firefighter, biker bar employee, recipient-of-sword-from-aking, editor and writer, Isaac Fitzgerald has had a colourful life. When BuzzFeed, one of the best sources of 'interesting' content on the web - launched its 'Books' section only last year, they got Fitzgerald, co-owner of The Rumpus and founder of Pen & Ink - to helm it. The lively, bearded man took to the main stage of Hay on Day 2 in a more stand-up-comedian gusto than literary-festival-session for "Top 10 Buzzes of the Year", and in a fast-paced hour, spoke how the World Wide Web has been buzzing on the literary front.

"Writing is a form of conversation," Fitzgerald gave away probably one of the biggest trade secrets to producing reader-engaging writing at the very beginning. "And the incredible thing about the internet is that it has unending space - any idea you have, anything you create, you can publish it there, most often for free." BuzzFeed began in 2006 trying to figure out why people share things online, and to bring audiences to the site, and give them content they wanted to share. But then it developed from being a source of just funny images and jokes, to in-depth and highly informative material. "Serious, fun and smart - does not necessarily have to be separate," exclaimed Fitzgerald.

He also spoke about reading trends, pointing out that in the US, a major survey found that people under 30 are reading more than their counterpart age group. And also, reading and writing both have evolved to fit this expanding readership - a result of which was the launch of BuzzFeed Books, and its success. Fitzgerald also observed that printed books were not dying out because of electronic reading material, and that their appeal are different, further arguing that e-books have made reading easier by making it portable and contributed in growth of reading habits.

"People share items online for two reasons - either it says something about them, or it says something about their friends," Fitzgerald said, adding that it's why lists have proven immensely successful for BuzzFeed to drive audiences to the site. But quizzes, book suggestions based on readers' reading preferences and in-depth personal essay series were also doing the trick, he said, along with bridging books and films: "Read the following books before the movies come out" has proved successful, Fitzgerald added.

In Fits of Laughter

Launching of Naveed Mahbub's new book "Humorously Yours"

AMIYA HALDER

When a man declares, "My mission in life is to make people laugh", you can be sure you're in for an evening of hysterics. Naveed Mahbub launched his new book "Humorously Yours" on Friday at Hay Fest.

The panel of guest speakers consisted of Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, vice-chancellor of University of Asia Pacific and Naveed's former professor at BUET; Firdous Azim, academician, and Anisul Hoque, writer and fellow humorist. Politician and award-winning writer, Shashi Tharoor, was also in the audience to get a glimpse of Bangladeshi comedy at its very best.

"Humorously Yours" is a collection of Naveed's satirical column by the same name, issued in *The Daily Star* over the years 2011 to 2013. Set against the back-

drop of a time of crisis and tension, "Humorously Yours" is a witty and unsparring take on Bangladeshi politics and society.

Attendees got a healthy dose of what's in store with Naveed's priceless one-liners and tall tales. "Humorously Yours" was conceived in the cubicles of Radisson's finest restroom, where the editor of *The Daily Star*, Mahfuz Anam, asked him, "Naveed, why don't you write for us?" to which all the comedian had to say was, "If you hand me the soap, I will." Anisul Hoque, who, like Naveed, also bid farewell to engineering, was full of praise for the book. The celebrated writer jokingly remarked he "was burning with jealousy and rage" when he picked up a copy of "Humorously Yours" the other day.

"Humorously Yours" is available at Daily Star Books.



(L-R) Anisul Hoque, Jamilur Reza Chowdhury and Firdous Azim enjoy Naveed Mahbub's comedy routine.

PHOTO: RIDWAN ADIL RUPON